

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TUNIS 00072 051914Z
ACTION H-03

INFO OCT-01 EUR-08 NEA-07 ISO-00 SS-15 NSC-06 AID-01
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P 051720Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9457
(SECDEF ISA/DSAA PRIORITY
INFO USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE ECJ4/7
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK
COMSIXTHFLT
CNO WASHDC
DA WASHDC DALO
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USNATO

S E C R E T TUNIS 0072

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS TS
SUBJ: CODEL ZABLOCKI MEETING WITH TUNISIAN DEFENSE MINISTER
FARHAT, JAN 3.

1. THIS MSG ADDRESSES MEETING CODEL ZABLOCKI WITH TN DEFMIN
FARHAT AND TN MOD STAFF, 3 JAN 78. AMEMB TUNIS WILL PROVIDE
DETAILS OF VISIT 3-4 JAN 78 BY SEPARATE MSG.

2. CODEL ZABLOCKI AND STAFF MET WITH TN DEFMIN FARHAT AND
TN MOD STAFF AT 1900, 3 JAN 78 AT DEFENSE MINISTRY AFTER
PREVIOUS VISITS SAME DAY WITH PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA, PRIME
MINISTER NOUIRA, PRESIDENT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DR. MAKADDEM
AND FOREIGN MINISTER FITOURI.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 TUNIS 00072 051914Z

3. MINISTER FARHAT UNDERLINED REQUIREMENTS FOR TNMOD FOR
CONTINUATION OF FMS CREDITS FOR PURCHASE OF SPECIFIC WEAPONS
SYSTEMS FROM USG. HE EMPHASIZED STRICTLY DEFENSIVE NATURE
OF WEAPONS PURCHASES. FARHAT EMPHASIZED THAT TN CONCEPT
OF DEFENSE WAS TOTAL MOBILIZATION OF POPULATION; THAT
CERTAIN WEAPONS SUGGESTED BY USG ARE OUTMODED IN EYES OF

MOD (E.G., MIM72A); THAT EFFICIENCY OF WEAPONS SYSTEMS WAS PARAMOUNT IN ORDER TO PROVIDE A CREDIBLE DEFENSE. FARHAT FURTHER STATED THAT POTENTIAL ENEMIES (E.G. LIBYA AND ALGERIA) HAVE COMBAT CAPABILITIES THAT TUNISIA CANNOT MATCH WITHOUT EXPENDING INORDINATE AMOUNTS FOR DEFENSE. HE STATED FURTHER THAT WHILE HE RECOGNIZED NECESSITY OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, HE FEARED U.S. LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURES MIGHT DELAY RESPONSE TO TUNISIAN ARMS REQUESTS. AT THE SAME TIME, FARHAT REQUESTED CONTINUED APPROVAL BY CONGRESS OF FMS CREDITS FOR TUNISIA IN THE FUTURE. HE EXPLAINED THAT TUNISIA SEEKS FRIENDSHIP AND GOOD RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS, BUT THAT POSSESSION OF CREDIBLE AND VISIBLE DEFENSE WAS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN ATTAINING THAT OBJECTIVE.

4. FARHAT MENTIONED A \$600M DEFENSE MODERNIZATION PROGRAM FOR TUNISIA OVER 4 YEAR PERIOD (TO BE FINANCED OVER LONGER 8-10 YEAR PERIOD), ANN WAS APPRECIATIVE OF THE \$125M FMS CREDITS PROVIDED FOR FROM USG FOR PERIOD FY 76-80. FARHAT STATED THAT MENACE IS LESS APPARENT THAN IT WAS SOME MONTHS AGO BUT THAT GEO-POLITICAL POSITION OF TUNISIA MADE IT CRITICAL IN MEDITERRANEAN STRATEGY. HE EMPHASIZED 30,000 MAN MAXIMUM STRENGTH OF TUNISIAN ARMED FORCES, OF WHICH 5,000 ARE ALWAYS ENGAGED IN "SERVICE NATIONALE" (PRIMARILY CIVIC ACTION WORK SUCH AS ROAD CONSTRUCTION, SCHOOLS, ANDH SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 TUNIS 00072 051914Z

DWELLINGS IN REMOTE SAHARAN REGIONS OF TUNISIA).

5. WHEN QUERIED BY CODEL ON SPECIFICS OF THREAT TO TUNISIA, FARHAT INDICATED THAT THREATS COME FROM BOTH ALGERIA AND LIBYA WITHOUT GOING INTO FURTHER SPECIFICS. HE DID SAY THAT TUNISIA WAS FACED WITH "HIGHS" AND "LOWS" OF THREAT FROM NEIGHBORS AND THAT THEY WERE NOW IN A "LOW" ALTHOUGH CAPABILITY REMAINS OMINOUS FROM EITHER ALGERIA OR LIBYA.

6. FARHAT VOLUNTEERED THAT HE KNEW CODEL WAS MOST CONCERNED WITH SOVIET USE OF MENZEL BOURGUIBA. HE EXPLAINED THAT MENZEL BOURGUIBA SHIPYARDS WERE CEDED TO TUNISIA BY FRANCE IN 1963. HE SAID THAT SHIPYARD WORKFORCE HAD DROPPED FROM 1500 TO 800 AND THAT TUNISIA WAS IN DEFICIT \$300M BECAUSE OF LACK OF UTILIZATION OF SHIPYARDS. HE STATED THAT TUNISIA HAD ASKED BOTH FRANCE AND US TO UTILIZE THE SHIPYARDS SINCE 1973 TO NO AVAIL. UNTIL 1973, FARHAT SAID, SOVIET SHIPS WERE FORBIDDEN EVEN TO STOP IN TUNISIA AND HAD TO REMAIN OUTSIDE 12-MILE LIMIT. AFTER 1973 TUNISIA OPENED ONE PORT-BIZERTE-TO SOVIET SHIPS; ALL PORT CALLS INCLUDE RE-SUPPLY AS WELL AS EMERGENCY REPAIR FACILITIES. HE FURTHER STATED THAT GOT HAS NO FORMAL AGREEMENT WITH USSR FOR USE

OF MENZEL BOURGUIBA NOR IS IT A HABITUAL PRACTICE (HABIT") TO PERMIT SOVIET SHIPS TO UTILIZE SHIPYARDS THERE REGULARLY. HE ALSO SAID THAT EACH SOVIET REQUEST IS STUDIED ON INDIVIDUAL BASIS IN DEFENSE MINISTRY WHOSE APPROVAL IS REQUIRED BEFORE GOT AUTHORIZATION IS GIVEN. CHAIRMAN ZABLOCKI STATED THAT HE SAW NO REASON WHY US SHIPS SHOULD NOT USE MENZEL BOURGUIBA SHIPYARDS.

7. FARHAT'S DISCUSSION WAS WELL PRESENTED AND OTHER THAN ALLUSION OF REFUSAL OF USG TO SELL MIM72C TO TUPISIA WAS WELL RECEIVE D.

CODEL WAS DESAPPOINTED OVER LACK OF DEFINITIVE THREAT INFORMATION (SHICH SECURITY CHIEF GENERAL BALMA LATER STATED HE WOULD FURNISH). OVERALL TONE OF MEETING WAS MOST CORDIAL
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 TUNIS 00072 051914Z

AND CODEL WAS IMPRESSED BY FARHAT'S FRANKNESS AND OPENESS.

8. ALTHOUGH CHUSLOT-PREPARED BRIEFING TO CODEL WAS OMITTED BECAUSE OF TIME CONSTRAINES, XEROX COPIES OF VIEWGRAPHS WERE PROVIDED TO COL KARL LAUENSTEIN, DSAA, WHO ACCOMPANIED CODEL. INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS ON SECURITY ASSISTANCE WERE HELD DURING COURSE OF VISIT WITH MEMBERS OF CODEL.

9. AS AN AFTER THOUGHT, FARHAT STRONGLY PRAISED USG FOR GREAT ASSISTANCE TO TUNISIAN ARMED FORCES BY INCREASE OF EMETP FUNDS. HARHAT FELT THAT MILITARY TRAINING PROGRAM FURTHER CEMENTED EXCELLENT RELATIONS BETWEEN TUNISIAN AND U.S. ARMED FORCES, AND HE WELCOMED CORDIAL PERSONAL RELATIONS AS WELL AS UNDERSTANDING OF DEMOCRACY WHICH TUNISIAN MILITARY PERSONNEL GAINED FROM SUXH EXCHANGED.

10. THIS IS A JOINT AMEMB TUNIS-USLOT MESSAGE. THIS REPORT IS SUBJECT TO APPROVAL OR AMENDMENT BY CODEL.
MULCAHY

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